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Structural Equation Modeling

Research Note

Cigarette Use by Adolescents: Attitude–Behavior Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Structural equation models were used to test the effectiveness of various theories in predicting cigarette smoking among adolescents. Maximum-likelihood estimation, as implemented in LISREL for Windows 8.12, was used to compare the theory of reasoned action (TRA), the theory of planned behavior, and a modified version of the theory of reasoned action incorporating past behavior. Respondents consisted of 225 high school students who were questioned in 1994 about their attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, past behavior, intentions, and actual behavior relating to the use of cigarettes. Results indicated that the modification of the TRA incorporating past behavior provided a marginally better fit than the other models. For this group of high school students, attitudes toward smoking, past behavior in relation to smoking, and perceptions of what significant others think they should do were significant predictors of their intentions to smoke. Intentions, together with past behavior, predicted their actual behavior. The models used in the present research show that this behavior can be explained with reference to a small number of key variables which are useful for furthering our understanding of the structure of adolescent smoking.

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Key words. Cigarette use; Adolescents; Attitude–behavior relationship; LISREL

INTRODUCTION

Predictors of Cigarette Use

Many studies have aimed to identify the antecedents and correlates of cigarette use among adolescents. Initial experimentation with cigarettes seems to occur in small same-sex groups of peers (primarily close friends) and siblings (Friedman et al., 1985; Hahn et al., 1990). Factors often associated with the uptake and maintenance of smoking include having a sibling who is a smoker (Meier, 1991), attitudes toward smoking (Oei and Burton, 1990), and the social influences of parents (Isohanni et al., 1991) and peers (Webster et al., 1994). Other predictive factors identified in longitudinal studies include spending time with friends of the opposite sex, sensitivity to pressure from peers, and discounting the harmful effects of smoking (see Swan et al., 1990). The majority of studies in this area, however, are based on linear, "cause and effect" views about the etiology of cigarette smoking. The research designs and data analysis techniques that are used tend to reinforce this view. It is therefore important to take into account the potential influence of other factors which may impact upon this behavior and which may provide a better understanding of adolescent smoking.

A Theoretical Basis for the Study of Smoking-Related Attitudes and Behavior

As Sutton (1989) has noted, one of the shortcomings of many studies on the link between attitudes toward smoking and actual behavior has been the lack of a theoretical context in which to base the research. The theory of reasoned action (TRA, Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) takes into account both personal and social factors in the prediction of behavioral intention, which in turn predicts actual behavior. The theory has been successfully used to predict a variety of aspects related to the use of cigarettes such as smoking initiation (Sutton, 1989), frequency of smoking (Budd, 1986; Fishbein, 1982), and smoking cessation (Marin et al., 1990). In Budd's study of undergraduates and in Fishbein's study of young women, attitude and subjective norm significantly predicted intentions to smoke while intentions, in turn, predicted actual behavior. Similar support for the model was obtained in studies of adolescents (Chassin et al., 1984; Presson et al., 1984).

However, the model fails to consider other variables which may influence behavior without being mediated by behavioral intention. In Budd's (1986) research, past behavior was included as an additional predictor of intentions, and this resulted in a significant increase in the amount of explained variance. A

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number of studies have found that the inclusion of past behavior in the model results in direct links between past behavior and intentions (e.g., Bagozzi et al., 1992; Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1990) and between past behavior and future behavior (e.g., Godin et al., 1992; De Vries et al., 1995). Having engaged in a particular behavior in the past, the individual has presumably obtained the appropriate resources or displayed the necessary skills to achieve the goal. With regard to smoking, adolescents who have been able to obtain cigarettes, practiced smoking them, and found opportunities to smoke them are more likely to be able to follow through their intentions to smoke them on future occasions. As noted by Kashima et al. (1993), this provides direct experience upon which attitudes may be based, which in turn leads to the formation of intentions which are more stable and less subject to change on the basis of further information. By smoking, the adolescent has also begun to show a degree of commitment to the behavior, and this commitment further stabilizes the behavioral intention.

Another modification to the theory incorporates the measurement of perceived behavioral control (PBC); this has resulted in the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). PBC encompasses resources, skills, and opportunities beyond the individual's control. These factors may influence behavior either directly or indirectly via intention. Although the TPB, in comparison to the TRA, has been shown to provide a better prediction of behaviors which are not under volitional control (Madden et al., 1992), findings in relation to PBC and smoking behavior are mixed. In a study of smoking among 6th to 12th grade adolescents, PBC generally failed to significantly predict intentions to smoke (Presson et al., 1984). However, the inclusion of PBC (termed "self-efficacy") in a more recent study found that it was a significant predictor of both intentions and actual behavior (De Vries et al., 1995).

Another concern regarding the model is that it involves a rather narrow conceptualization of social influences, with these being measured by subjective norm and its belief-based component of normative beliefs (i.e., how each significant other thinks the individual should behave) and the individual's motivation to comply with each of these people. The importance of other factors such as social disapproval and risk taking/rebelliousness (Collins et al., 1987), friendship choice (Eiser et al., 1991), and social influences such as perceived smoking behavior and direct pressure (De Vries et al., 1995) has been demonstrated in previous research on smoking behavior. The present research, while limited mainly to those factors contained within the TRA, provides necessary information about one aspect of social influence.

The Present Study

The primary aim of the present study was to investigate the applicability of the TRA, the TPB, and a modification of the TRA incorporating past behavior

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in explaining the significance of various influences on cigarette use among adolescents. Model 1 consists of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) TRA. Model 2 consists of an extension of the TRA which incorporates links between past behavior and behavioral intention and between past behavior and actual behavior. Model 3 consists of Ajzen's (1985) TPB in which the influence of PBC on actual behavior is both direct and indirect via behavioral intentions.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 225 Year 8 students (109 males and 116 females) at three state government high schools. The mean age of students was 12.5 years (SD = 0.6), with a range from 12 to 14 years. Initial analyses confirmed that the subjects from each school were not significantly different according to age, sex, socioeconomic status, or initial number of smokers and nonsmokers. Table 1 shows students' responses to various descriptive questions. Most students and their parents were born in Australia and most students lived with both parents. The majority rated themselves as either good or very good students, and the largest percentage reported that they first tried cigarettes in Year 7 (when most students turn 12 years of age).

Procedure

Several schools were suggested by the Department of Education for inclusion in the study. Principals of three schools which were in similar socioeconomic areas were then approached for permission to conduct the study. Individual parental consent forms were not required once the principals approved the questionnaire and agreed to the study being conducted. All Year 8 students who were at school on the day of questionnaire administration (in 1994) completed a pretest and, 1 month later, a posttest questionnaire. Students were told that the research was being undertaken to learn more about young people's attitudes and behaviors in relation to the use of cigarettes, and that this information would be valuable in guiding the development of appropriate education programs. This information was provided by a young, female Australian psychologist and doctoral student who was also a qualified school teacher. Questionnaires were completed in a classroom setting, supervised by the class teacher. Students were advised that completion of the questionnaires was voluntary and all students agreed to participate. They were assured of confidentiality and were requested to put a code on the front page for identification purposes. This code consisted of a unique combination of their own and their parents' initials. Upon completion of the questionnaire, students placed it in an envelope which was then sealed once all

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Table 1.

Percentage Respondents in Various Categories

School year in which first cigarette was tried:	1–3 20%	4 3%	5 17%	6 20%	7 29%	8 11%
Who do you live with?	Both parents 78%	Mother/stepfather 10%	Mother only 9%	Other 3%		
Born in Australia:	Respondent 93%	Father 83%	Mother 84%			
Self-rating as a student:	Excellent 12%	Very good 26%	Good 39%	Average 22%	Below average <1%	

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questionnaires were placed inside. Of the 316 questionnaires completed at the time of the pretest, 225 were able to be matched with posttest questionnaires. This represents 71.2% of the original questionnaires which were able to be analyzed. Reasons for the inability to match all of the questionnaires include student absence on the day of test administration and the use by students of different identification codes, either intentionally or unintentionally, for each questionnaire.

Measures

The wording of questionnaire items was based on Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) guidelines for operationalizing the key variables of the TRA. All items on the final questionnaire were pretested with 50 Year 8 students from a comparable school which was not involved in the study. The time taken to complete the questionnaire ranged from 30 to 40 minutes. Table 2 shows the items used to assess the key variables in the study.

RESULTS

Testing the Models

Alternative models were fitted to the data using LISREL 8.12 for Windows (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1993). Table 3 shows the correlation matrix for the variables being analyzed in all of the models, and Table 4 shows the goodness-of-fit measures obtained. The standardized solutions used to estimate effects in Model 1 (TRA) are shown in Fig. 1. Higher scores indicate more positive views in relation to smoking behavior, and nonsignificant links between variables are shown in parentheses. More positive attitude and subjective norms predicted stronger intentions to smoke cigarettes in the next month, and intentions predicted actual behavior. The χ^2, CFI, RFI, RMSEA, and RMR indicate that the model fits the data well.

The results of fitting Model 2 (TRA + past behavior) are shown in Fig. 2. Apart from the link between subjective norm and intention, all of the predicted links between variables in Model 2 were significant. The goodness-of-fit measures also showed that this model fits the data well. Model 3 (TPB) is represented in Fig. 3. The inclusion of PBC in this model failed to result in significant links with either intentions or actual behavior. Significant links emerged between attitudes and intentions, subjective norm and intentions, and between intentions and actual smoking behavior, supporting the relationships specified by the TRA.

DISCUSSION

Overall, only minor differences emerged in the fit of the three models, although the results suggest that Model 2 (TRA + past behavior) provides a mar-

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Table 2.

Questionnaire Measures

Variable	No. items summed	Measures	No. points on scale	Endpoints of scale	Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)
Intention	3	I intend to smoke cigarettes in next month.	7	extremely unlikely (–3) → extremely likely (+3)	.94
		I will try to smoke cigarettes in next month.	7	extremely unlikely (–3) → extremely likely (+3)	
		How often do you intend to smoke cigarettes in next month?	5	not at all (1) → very often (5)	
Attitude	5	My smoking cigarettes in next month would be	7	unhealthy (–3) → healthy (+3)	.93
			7	unpleasant (3) → pleasant (+3)	
			7	bad (–3) → good (+3)	
			7	harmful (–3) → beneficial (+3)	
Subjective norm	1	Most people who are important to me think that I should smoke cigarettes in the next month.	7	extremely unlikely (–3) → extremely unlikely (+3)	N/A
PBC	3	How much control do you have over whether or not you smoke cigarettes in next month?	7	no control (–3) → complete control (+3)	.6
		For me to smoke cigarettes in next month is	7	difficult (–3) → easy (+3)	
		It is mostly up to me whether or not I smoke cigarettes in next month.	7	strongly disagree (–3) → strongly agree (+3)	
Past behavior	2	How often did you smoke cigarettes in past month?	5	not at all (–2) → very often (+2)	.94
		On average, how many times did you smoke cigarettes in past month?	7	not at all (1) → more than 1/day (7)	
Actual behavior	2	How often did you smoke cigarettes in past month?	5	not at all (–2) → very often (+2)	.92
		On average, how many times did you smoke cigarettes in past month?	7	not at all (1) → more than 1/day (7)	

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Table 3.

Correlations between Variables[a]

	INT	BEH	ATT	SN	PAST	PBC
INT	1.000					
BEH	0.553	1.000				
ATT	0.725	0.384	1.000			
SN	0.627	0.597	0.490	1.000		
PAST	0.922	0.624	0.763	0.743	1.000	
PBC	0.519	0.257	0.406	0.376	0.291	1.000

[a]INT = intention; BEH = behavior; ATT = attitude; SN = subjective norm; PAST = past behavior; PBC = perceived behavioral control.

ginally better fit than the other models. In this model, attitudes toward smoking, past behavior in relation to smoking, and perceptions of what significant others thought respondents should do were the significant predictors of intentions to smoke. Intentions, together with past behavior, predicted actual smoking. In Model 2 the significant path from past behavior to intention supports the view that having engaged in a behavior in the past, the stability of the intention to engage in the behavior in the future is strengthened. This confirms the importance of adding past behavior to the TRA, a conclusion supported by previous studies in which this variable has exerted a significant influence (e.g., Bagozzi et al., 1992; De Vries et al.,1995).

In terms of the significance of the internal links within each model, all but one of the overall goodness-of-fit measures indicated that the TRA (Model 1) provided a good fit to the data, supporting previous research in relation to cigarette smoking (e.g., Budd, 1986; Fishbein, 1982). In both the TRA and the TPB (Model 3), attitudes had a strong direct influence on intentions, supporting other research showing that children who have tried cigarettes generally had more positive attitudes toward smoking (Oei and Burton, 1990).

Table 4.

Goodness-of-Fit Measures for Models Tested[a]

				Model tests			
Model	χ^2	p	df	RMR	CFI	RFI	RMSEA
1 TRA	15.50	.0004	2	.068	.92	.73	.24
2 TRA + PAST	15.20	.0005	2	.047	.97	.81	.22
3 TPB	15.33	.0005	2	.055	.92	.58	.24

[a]TRA = Theory of Reasoned Action; TRA + PAST = Modified Version of Theory of Reasoned Action Incorporating Past Behavior; TPB = Theory of Planned Behavior.

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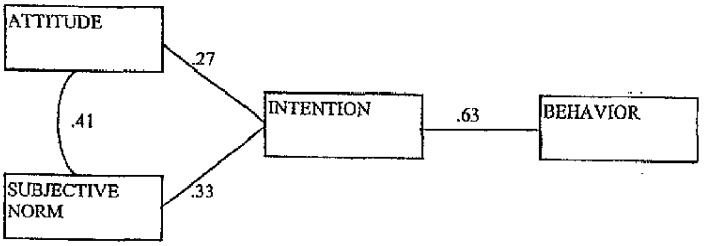

Fig. 1. Regression paths and correlations for Model 1 (all paths are significant).

In terms of the effects of subjective norm, smokers perceived most important others as being more tolerant than did nonsmokers. This is consistent with previous research on adolescents in which smokers perceived their parents (Eiser and Van Der Pligt, 1984) and friends (Urberg et al., 1990) as being more tolerant than did nonsmokers. The process underlying this effect has yet to be clearly determined. While many studies have shown that the friends of young smokers are more likely to be smokers themselves (e.g., Eiser and Van Der Pligt, 1984), more recent large-scale research indicates that the characteristics of those whom adolescents choose as their friends tend to include a range of features that they have in common such as attitudinal, behavioral, and background characteristics (Eiser et al., 1991). The smoking-related behaviors and attitudes of friends are

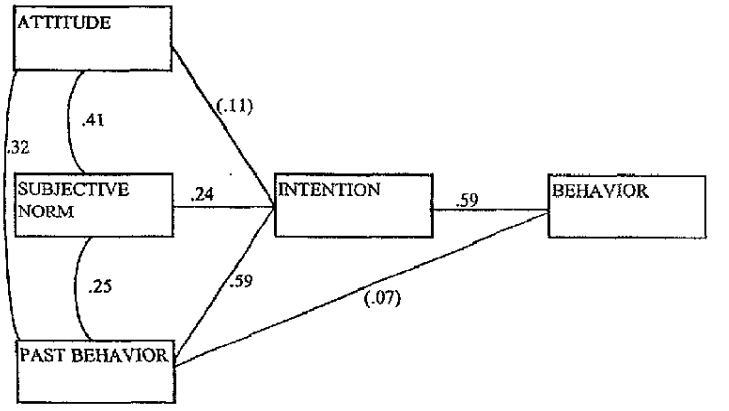

Fig. 2. Regression paths and correlations for Model 2 (nonsignificant paths are shown in parentheses).

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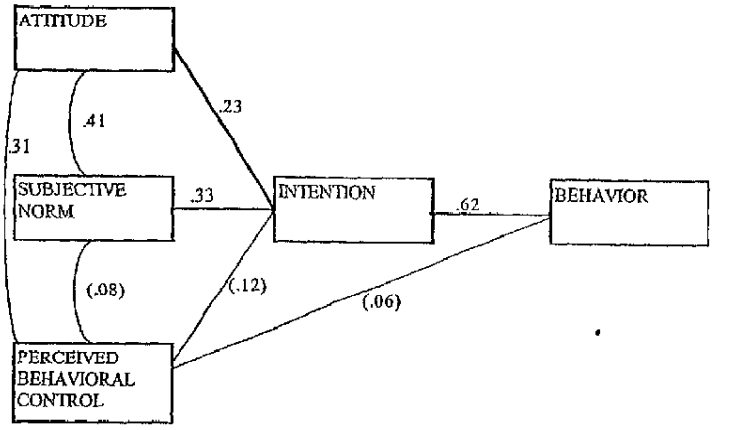

Fig. 3. Regression paths and correlations for Model 3 (nonsignificant paths are shown in parentheses).

just one aspect of a range of characteristics that attract adolescents to form friendships with certain other adolescents.

Favorable results were obtained for all of the overall goodness-of-fit indices for the theory of planned behavior (Model 3). Perceived behavioral control, however, failed to be significantly related to any other variables in the model. Contrary to expectations, factors related to problems of control, such as obtaining cigarettes and finding the opportunity to smoke them, were not as important in predicting intentions and behavior as attitudes and perceived social pressures from other people. This may suggest that cigarettes are too readily available for adolescents, and this may be an issue which requires further investigation to determine ways in which to more effectively restrict their availability.

Future research could also improve upon the measure of subjective norm used in the present study as this consisted of only one item. While this item has been shown to be a suitable predictor of intentions, the use of a multiple-item measure may provide more reliable and sensitive measurement. Although the findings from the present study largely support previous research, the use of a convenience sample limits the generalizability of the results. Further, although a range of significant influences has been identified in each of the models, there are other processes (e.g., friendship choice) which should be taken into account before a comprehensive understanding of adolescent smoking may be gained. The advantage of research based on theories such as those in the present study is that they provide a framework for systematically measuring and investigating the in-

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influence of key variables which may then be used to provide a parsimonious explanation of a complex behavior.

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RESUMEN

Se utilizó modelos de ecuaciones estructurales para poner a prueba la efectividad de diversas teorías sobre la predicción del consumo de cigarrillos entre los adolescentes. Se utilizó estimación del máximo de la posibilidad, según se implementa en LISREL for Windows 8.12 para comparar la teoría sobre la acción razonada, la teoría sobre comportamiento preconcebido y una versión modificada de la teoría sobre la acción razonada incorporando conductas del pasado. Respondieron 225 estudiantes de la escuela secundaria a quienes se les preguntó sobre sus actitudes, normas subjetivas, percepciones sobre obstáculos a la conducta, conductas del pasado, intenciones, y conductas presentes en relación al consumo de cigarrillos. Los resultados indicaron que la modificación de le teoría sobre comportamiento preconcebido incorporando conductas del pasado se ajustó un poco mejor que los otros modelos. Para este grupo de estudiantes de la escuela secundaria, las atitudes sobre el cigarrillo, las conductas del pasado en relación al cigarrillo, y las percepciones sobre lo que la pareja considera como conducta aceptable predijeron de manera significativa la intención de fumar. Las intenciones, junto con las conductas del pasado, predijeron la conducta actual. Los modelos utilizados en la presente investigación muestran que esta conducta puede explicarse con referencia a un pequeño número de variables claves que son útiles para tratar de profundizar nuestra comprensión sobre la estructura del fumar en los adolescentes.

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RÉSUMÉ

Des modèles d'équation structurale ont été utilisés pour tester l'efficacité des différentes méthodes qui permettent de prédire les adolescents fumeurs. La probabilité maximale estimée, décrite dans LISREL pour Window 8.12, a été utilisée pour comparer la théorie des mesures par raisonnement, la théorie du comportement planifié et la version modifiée de la théorie des mesures par raisonnement, associant les comportements passés. Les sujets se composaient de 225 étudiants de lycée, interrogés sur leur croyance, leur norme subjective, leur perception du comportement influencé par des données externes, leur comportement passé, leur dessein et leur attitude actuelle quant à l'utilisation de la cigarette. Les résultats montrent que la théorie des mesures par raisonnement associant le comportement passé convenait légèrement mieux que les autres modèles. Pour ce même groupe de sujet, leur croyance, leur comportement et leur perception quant à l'opinion des personnes environnantes les plus capitales étaient des facteurs primordiaux, prédisatn leur intention de fumer. Leurs intentions ainsi qui leurs attitudes passées prédisaient leur comportement actuel. Les modèles utilisés dans cette recherche montrent que la comportement peut être expliqué, en utilisant un petit nombre de variables-clé, nécessaire à accroître notre connaissance sur la psychologie des adolescents fumeurs.

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Frances V. O'Callaghan, Ph.D., completed her doctorate in social and health psychology at The University of Queensland in 1994. She is a lecturer at Griffith University and her research interests are in the areas of drug use and communication in close relationships.

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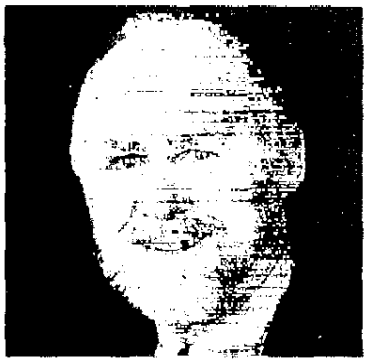

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